

The Briefing



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Hymn of the month

[Sandy Grant \(http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/authors/sandy-grant/\)](http://matthiasmedia.com/briefing/authors/sandy-grant/) | 29 June, 2010

(Updated with correct link to [‘To God Be the Glory’ \(http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2010/06/27/hymn-of-the-month-to-god-be-the-glory/\)](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2010/06/27/hymn-of-the-month-to-god-be-the-glory/) and link to Sandy’s post on [‘Amazing Grace’ \(http://solapanel.org/article/john_newton_and_amazing_grace/\)](http://solapanel.org/article/john_newton_and_amazing_grace/).)

Nothing gets a debate going like opinions on church music. But here’s an idea that’s found very little resistance at church; instead, it’s received lots of support: the hymn of the month.

The idea originally came from [Covenant Life Church \(http://www.covlife.org/hymns\)](http://www.covlife.org/hymns) (founded by CJ Mahaney and now pastored by Josh Harris). Rather than relying just on contemporary songs, they saw value in hymns that have proven themselves over generations as true and powerful. They also saw memorizing hymns as one way to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” ([Col 3:16 \(https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%203.16\)](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col%203.16)). They used a different hymn over 10 months, providing a brief background to each hymn and also making a recording of these hymns available for MP3 download on a free or “pay what you think it is worth basis”.

We followed their 10 hymns and then added a few others in following months. We’d sing the chosen hymn each Sunday of the month at each of our four congregations. (That means, in five Sunday months, I sang the hymn 20 times!) We found singing the ‘hymn of the month’ a unifying experience across our four congregations, which range in age and

style from traditional over 60s to young adults and youth. Although we met at different times, it was something we could do in common. It affirmed our great musical heritage, and although the younger congregations still sing predominantly contemporary songs, the practice encouraged them to enjoy the biblical and musical riches from former generations as well.

After the first two, I began writing a 500-word article on each hymn to go in the church bulletin. Sometimes I focused more on the story of the hymn writer; Christian biography can be so interesting. But often I wanted to highlight which parts of the Bible the hymn's imagery came from. As a result, I think the articles helped people pay even more attention to the lyrics (links provided below).

- [Amazing Grace \(http://solapanel.org/article/john_newton_and_amazing_grace/\)](http://solapanel.org/article/john_newton_and_amazing_grace/)
- Before the Throne of God Above: We used the hymn-like modern tune, written by Vikki Cook in 1997.
- [Praise to the Lord, the Almighty \(http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/01/14/singing-hymns-together/\)](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/01/14/singing-hymns-together/)
- [And Can It Be? \(http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/03/16/hymn-of-the-month-and-can-it-be/\)](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/03/16/hymn-of-the-month-and-can-it-be/)
- [Crown Him with Many Crowns \(http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/04/30/crown-him-with-many-crowns/\)](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/04/30/crown-him-with-many-crowns/)
- [A Mighty Fortress \(http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/05/12/a-mighty-fortress-hymn-of-the-month/\)](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/05/12/a-mighty-fortress-hymn-of-the-month/): This didn't work so well because the tune was a little less accessible and there was too much difficult vocabulary and sentence structure (bulwark, craft [as in 'skill in trickery'], confide, Sabaoth etc.) for our younger members—especially the many overseas students who attend
- [Be Still, My Soul \(http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/06/24/hymn-of-the-month-%E2%80%9Cbe-still-my-soul%E2%80%9D/\)](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/06/24/hymn-of-the-month-%E2%80%9Cbe-still-my-soul%E2%80%9D/)
- [How Firm a Foundation \(http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/07/09/hymn-of-the-month-%E2%80%9Cchow-firm-a-foundation%E2%80%9D/\)](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/07/09/hymn-of-the-month-%E2%80%9Cchow-firm-a-foundation%E2%80%9D/)
- [Great is Your Faithfulness \(http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/08/04/hymn-of-the-month-great-is-your-faithfulness/\)](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/08/04/hymn-of-the-month-great-is-your-faithfulness/)
- [God Has Spoken \(http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/10/21/minister%E2%80%99s-letter-hymn-of-the-month-god-has-spoken/\)](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/10/21/minister%E2%80%99s-letter-hymn-of-the-month-god-has-spoken/)
- [In Christ Alone \(http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/11/18/minister%E2%80%99s-letter-in-christ-alone/\)](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2009/11/18/minister%E2%80%99s-letter-in-christ-alone/)

We included the last song because after reviving or introducing a dozen or so much-loved hymns of previous centuries to younger church members, I thought it was fair to ask our older members to share in one of the best modern hymns.

After having a break for a few months, we're going to have another go. But I think now I would only use the hymn three Sundays in the month to avoid 'wearing out the welcome'. Our next hymn will be one of my favourites: '[To God be the Glory](http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2010/06/27/hymn-of-the-month-to-god-be-the-glory/)' (<http://www.wollongong.anglican.asn.au/2010/06/27/hymn-of-the-month-to-god-be-the-glory/>). (We had it at our wedding, and I've put it on the list for my funeral too!)

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